

The Eskimos like other Canadians are men of their age. Contemporary men caught with the rest of us torn between Pflicht and opportunity.

There is not some remote culture shielded from change in a vast arctic museum with adventures at the Stone Age. Within the past dozen years the Eskimo people have become deeply involved in whatever phase of the new Canadian experience has reached them and their formidable homeland.

Daily and with gathering force the image of southern Canada is melting into the north. From Edmonton, Churchill, and Montreal the arctic is not flying like away. A place you can reach easily in a day if the weather is right and if the weather is difficult that you can be sure of reaching sometime.

The land is not the same; the ice, the break-up and freeze-up have not changed. But the old crushing isolation, the sheltering remoteness, the immense vacuum in communications, these are less than at any period in the north's long past. BY

The Inuit have a name for their land. Some call it "the beautiful land". Yet it is a hard land, too, where a livelihood has always been a precarious marginal existence. HUNGER and starvation have more often than not been the lot of the people. A land where life can flicker and blow out in a winter storm.

Storms are things the Inuit know the meaning of but the ways of the white man - these can still be hard to understand.

An elderly Eskimo who has been observing the white man many years remarked to me he knew well. "Some baboons behave half the time like mothers and the other half like children. Between the two they do not seem sure which it is they wish to be. They ask us many questions but they do not wait for the answers."

The white man nodded. "We talk too much about the Eskimos and not enough with them. And some of us are slow to ask advice." These men had been friends a long time.

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The Eskimos like other Canadians are men of their age. Contemporary men caught with the rest of us somewhere between plight and opportunity.

Theirs is not some remote culture shielded from change in a vast arctic museum with overtones of the Stone Age. Within the past dozen years the Eskimo people have become deeply involved in whatever phase of the total Canadian experience has touched them and their formidable homeland.

Daily and with gathering force the image of southern Canada is moving into the north. From Edmonton, Churchill, and Montreal the arctic is only flying time away. A place you can reach easily in a day if the weather is right and if the weather is difficult that you can be sure of reaching sometime.

The land is still as big, the winds as fierce; break-up and freeze-up have not changed. But the old crushing isolation, the sheltering remoteness, the immense vacuum in communications, these are less than at any period in the north's long past.

The Inuit have a name for their land. Some call it "the beautiful land". Yet it is a hard land, too, where a livelihood has always been a harsh marginal existence, where disease and starvation have more often than not been the lot of the people. A land where life can flicker and blow out in a winter storm.

Storms are things the Inuit know the meaning of but the ways of the white man - these can still be hard to understand.

An elderly Eskimo who has been observing the white man many years remarked to one he knew well, "Some kabloona behave half the time like masters and the other half like children. Between the two they do not seem sure which it is they wish to be. They ask us many questions but they do not wait for the answers."

The white man nodded. "We talk too much about the Eskimos and not enough with them. And some of us are slow to ask advice." These men had been friends a long time.

For both Inuit and kabloona these are the years of trial and in this they are rough brothers. As men unrelated by blood can become brothers in certain situations, like a man who is not an Eskimo can be adopted into an Eskimo family and become a son.

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Knud Rasmussen, the noted Greenlandic explorer who grew up with Eskimo his native tongue, wrote in Across Arctic America, the narrative of the Fifth Thule Expedition, "Some archaeologists have made bold to assert that the Eskimos are the surviving remnants of the Stone Age we know, and are, therefore, our contemporary ancestors. We don't have to go so far to claim kinship with them, however, for we recognize them as brothers."

Self-reliant and resourceful, the Inuit have easily gained the friendship and respect of those who hunted and travelled with them.

So much has been written about the Eskimos that it is easy to assume their numbers greater than they are. They form part of four nations, Russia, Canada, Denmark, and the United States, and the area they cover is immense, but the numbers of Eskimos in the world may be fewer than 60,000. Some 12,000 of these live in Canada where their natural increase (3-4 per cent a year) indicates that their numbers will double in about 20 years. They are the only native people who live in both Asia and America.

Rasmussen describes an early morning on the summit of East Cape, the steep headland that forms the eastern extremity of Siberia when the first snow had already settled on the heights. "The landscape has a calm grandeur of its own; far away in the sun-haze of the horizon rises Great Diomed Island, here forming the boundary between America and Asia."

It was Parry's second expedition in 1821-3 that seems to have aroused popular interest in the Eskimos. Parry spent two winters in Foxe Basin in the heart of the Eskimo country and both he and Lyon, his second-in-command, left excellent accounts which were widely read.

Canada's efforts from 1903 on to bring the Eskimos more within the framework of the nation are described by Diamond Jenness in Eskimo Administration in Canada, a study prepared for the Arctic Institute of North America with support from the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. It takes a scholarly, often troubled look at a situation whose built-in problems were immense and attempts to deal with them often desultory, uncoordinated, and hobbled by poor communications and lack of a northern policy.

As the century opened the Inuit must have seemed a long way from the rest of Canada. So, too, must many of those who were working in Eskimo country - missionaries, whalers, traders, the police. The Eskimos' impression of the white man's culture, customs, and motivations, must have been a curiously blurred image of heroic devotion, shrewd paternalism and hard-nosed drive for gain.

In the intervening years Eskimo affairs reflected the labours of many dedicated public servants but it was not until December 8, 1953, that the enormous question of what to do about the north was finally wheeled below the national spotlight. In a lengthy statement in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent moved second reading of a Bill to create the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

"We must leave no doubt about active occupation and exercise our sovereignty in these northern lands right up to the pole," the Prime Minister declared. It had surprised him to note on the map that the Northwest and Yukon Territories jointly comprised 39.3 per cent of Canada. "Apparently", he observed, "we have administered these vast territories of the north in an almost continuous state of absence of mind."

Whatever the past notice had been served that from now on, action was to be the word and there was an exhilarating feeling that new opportunities were to be offered to the venturesome. "The north" had a romantic ring about it and no one could doubt that its development was of first-class importance to Canada.

After so long a period of on-and-off administrative effort it was perhaps not surprising that one of the hard facts to confront the planners was Canada's lack of any substantial body of arctic research to draw on. Only a handful of Canadians outside the north were fluent in Eskimo; no real reserve existed of qualified men and women with arctic experience who could be tapped for northern service.

Partly at least this was the price paid by a nation larger in area than any except Russia and a population less than 15 million. A nation that had taken two wars and a depression in stride and concentrated its economic and social energies on developing opportunities closer to home.

Engineers already seasoned at building on muskeg and permafrost, at rock-blasting and working at below zero temperatures elsewhere in Canada were set new and complex problems to adapt cold weather experience to arctic town-planning, building schools, nursing stations, housing.

In all areas of the northern program pressure was heavy to show results; to do even faster whatever could be done in a hurry. In the arctic not much can.

Canadians who had not seriously looked at their maps in years discovered that the distance between Alert and Point Pelee was almost as great

as between Newfoundland and British Columbia. Polar projection maps that showed Canada in relation to other arctic powers were in great demand.

But it was not the maps of engineers; not teachers, doctors, nurses, Northern Service officers, not any of these and many others who went to serve on the frontier, that made the north seem real to the rest of Canada.

It was the Eskimos. So remote, so legendary, it was almost as though they inhabited outer space. It was the Inuit who gripped the imagination and aroused the concern of thousands of Canadians who might never visit "the beautiful land." Might never even see an Eskimo.

What sort of land was it to be - the new north?

In a few short words Gordon Robertson, then Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources and Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, described the north he and his men were working to build. "A region where race lines are unknown, and where the north will be run by its own people, standing on their own feet, and doing the job better than we in the south can do it."

Whatever their racial origin northerners were to be tomorrow's men.

The opportunities for Eskimo leadership appeared never so great. But the process of calling it forth, reviving it, creating it, were slow. The bridge between Eskimo past and contemporary Canada was only beginning to be built. It would take a long time to finish and be the work of many hands. Then would come the task of keeping it in repair. It would be a work never finished.

The letter of Akeeko is part of that bridge.

Akeeko was a very old man living in a small settlement in the Keewatin, land of the terrible winds. He had seen much change come to his land and of late years when he could no longer hunt, had had much time to think. And some of his thoughts troubled him. So in 1957 he began a great labour which was to write a letter to the Department of Northern Affairs. Even for a young and strong man so long a letter would have been a lot of work.

Akeeko's letter spoke of the good and bad things in the days before the kabloona came - family joys, hunter, blizzards, the pleasures of hunting, and life lived always in the shadow of sickness and of sudden or lingering

death. Akeeko was a child when the first white men came. They were whalers from Scotland and America and his father used to go with them in their boats. Sometimes they would stay away a whole year, locked in by ice.

There were no schools then but plenty of game until, without explanation, the game went away.

Akeeko recalls one bitter winter when his father was away and he was still a child, too young to hunt. He, his mother and his baby sister remained alone in the igloo.

"The weather was bad and there were blizzards. Our food would not last us and there I was not knowing how to kill fox. My sister would be crying all day because my mother did not have milk at her breast. You cannot tell whether a child knows emptiness, but it does and that is why my sister cried most of the time not knowing, yet sort of knowing."

In August the ice broke up, seals were plentiful and one day his father returned in the middle of a storm, "I could not believe he was alive ... I just started to cry."

When Akeeko married he and his wife were at first happy and well, but even in the good times reverses came. The caribou went away. "We were living in huts made of earth ... everything seemed to come at once ... no proper home, people sick, no money." Many Eskimo died that winter. He, himself, spent three years in hospital.

But now, Akeeko writes, many things have changed. The government has provided schools for the children, care for the sick, welfare services for families who cannot care for themselves, boats and nets for the Eskimos to increase their sea harvests of fish, whales and walrus meat. Eskimos have learned from the kabloona how to organize their own Co-operatives to market arctic char and salmon. The West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative at Cape Dorset, has become famous for the quality of its sculpture and graphic art and other communities too are producing good art and fine crafts. There is some kind of learning and training for all ages.

Akeeko did not suppose the kabloona could make these things work alone. They had to have the support and understanding of the Inuit, and the hard work, too. But a lifetime had taught him that people are people everywhere and there is no magic to make all sensible or honest or hard working. They are simply people - mixed-up, good and bad. The opinions of Akeeko are full of sense, the views of a man who knows his own people. "Some Eskimos hunt well and some do not. Some works very hard, some do not. Some

have sense and help each other, and some do not. This is the way it is in our country." He might have added, "Some Eskimos get drunk now and some don't." Learning how to handle liquor is all part of the warm houses and a bit of money in the bank; part of the years of trial. (As some kabloona have not yet learned how to stop falling on their own faces they have not much to teach the Inuit."

The views of old men are listened to politely but seldom regarded. Akeeko knew this but it did not stop him writing about what was on his mind. The new things that had come into the lives of the people, - the teaching now offered to Eskimos of all ages, the better harvests, the wages for those prepared to work white men's hours, - many of these were good. But much of it was confusing because it was coming too fast and in a way to shake the pride of men confident and efficient in the old skills of the land. He thought some kabloona were too concerned pressing on with their own day's work to seek the advice of the Eskimos.

"It would be better," Akeeko wrote, "if they talked to us more ... the written explanations we get are hard to follow. That is why the things we are asked to do never get done. It would be better if we were told by tongue. Eskimos do not pay attention to written things - not even myself."

But he knew the white man well enough to know that the only way to get these things through the heads of those who talked with paper was to put it all down in writing. "This is Akeeko writing," he reminded Ottawa halfway through the letter, "other Eskimos know much more than I do but they do not write." A humble man with a firm mind he had no wish to turn back the clock but to remind the kabloona that it takes time to learn many new things and that if they are not learned right there is danger a man may lose his self confidence and even forget he is an Eskimo.

Akeeko's is the voice of an old man who lived all his life in the wind-torn Keewatin, drove his dogs across the sea ice in winter and in his youth was an excellent hunter. His was the voice of the old arctic; of yesterday's men.

Now listen to the voice of Abraham Okpik who works in the area of public responsibility, of getting things done. He is one of the north's new men.

Tall, heavy-set, with an air of purpose, Mr. Okpik is the first Eskimo to be appointed a member of the Council of the Northwest Territories.

He has never been ruffled by publicity, of which he has received a good deal since becoming a civil servant some years ago. At the time of his appointment to Council on October 19, 1965, he was working in Yellowknife helping Eskimo hardrock miners from Rankin Inlet in the Keewatin adjust to urban life. Before that he had been program director and later acting director of the Eskimo Rehabilitation Centre at Frobisher Bay.

Speaking English with a slight Scottish burr from first having learned English from a Scottish teacher, he wasted no words in letting Council know where he stood. "I want no favours because of my origin," he declared, "I will express my convictions and be ready to criticize what I think should be criticized." To a reporter who asked if he ever planned to go back to a life on the land he replied, "I've no desire to go back to trapping and living in an igloo but if I had to, I could."

What does it mean to be an Eskimo? Some years ago in an eloquent plea to his own people Mr. Okpik wrote in the Eskimo language magazine, Inuktituk, "We are living in the present times without observing what we are losing, and that is our own Eskimo Inuk culture, which our great-great-grand-fathers have passed on to us generation after generation... We should learn as much as we can from this new culture but we must not forget our own culture ... Keep our language alive. Tell the old stories, sing the songs, dance the old dances, make jokes, enjoy this great power for thought developed from long ago by our ancestors ... There are only very few Eskimos but there are millions of whites, just like mosquitoes. It is something very special and wonderful to be an Eskimo - they are like the snow geese. If an Eskimo forgets his language and Eskimo ways, he will be nothing but just another mosquito. It is up to the Eskimos of today to use their Eskimo strength of word and thought. It is up to the young people."

Mr. Okpik was writing in 1962. Since then he has become progressively more involved in the broader context of the north.

As a member of the Northwest Territories Council he is dealing with legislation and planning that include Eskimo affairs but go beyond them; in his full-time job he is continuing to work directly with and for the Eskimo people.

But segments of the government's northern program directly affect the future of the Eskimos, and in other areas the Inuit share equally in such programs with all residents of the Northwest Territories.

In October 1965 Northern Affairs Minister Arthur Laing announced a \$12 million program to provide 1600 new Eskimo homes, in addition to the 1000 basic housing units already built. The problems in this area of Eskimo affairs are as large as they are human. The rising birth-rate, good in itself, has created acute over-crowding and a type of squalor that scars the face of too many arctic communities.

In the north children of all races go to school together. An education program that has built more than 60 schools will, by 1971, provide northerners with a pre-university education as good as any in Canada. Vocational education and training, and job placement services are an essential part of this to forestall the human disaster of well-educated young northerners with no place to apply their skills and knowledge.

Major questions beset the education program and in some instances there are no clear-cut answers yet. School training must be adapted to be of value to the Eskimo child who will choose to live on the land; equally it must serve the abilities of those who continue their academic work and may one day become leaders in their own regions or in the rest of Canada. From the beginning of school it takes 12 to 14 years to train the kind of skilled technician required by modern industry. The children who started school in the autumn of 1965 are the workers and leaders of 1980. All this cannot be accomplished overnight.

Evidence of the government's resolve to push ahead with political development of the north was contained in an announcement by the Minister on May 11, 1965, of the setting up of an Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories.

Political development, he pointed out, must keep pace with the remarkable changes occurring in the north. Territorial governments with powers commensurate to their present capacity for self-government and their ability to assume the financial and other responsibilities entailed, are essential if policies and programs responsive to the needs of the people of the Northwest Territories are to be achieved.

All this is part of the changing north.

Akeeko was a man without schooling who knew the beauty of his land when the sun returns in the arctic springtime and knew its dark ferocious winds. In his youth he had fought back sickness and weather but when he laid his

thoughts before the far-off kabloona he wrote as a humble man not realising that though the men he was writing to were different, they were no better than he.

Okpik, the first time he spoke before the Council of the Northwest Territories, used the tone of a man addressing equals, neither better nor worse than himself.

Between these two men of the old and new arctic, lies a valley where many Eskimos still dwell not knowing which kind of men they are or where they are going. Some see clearly but others drift left and right like blind men. They know inuktitut, the Eskimo way, but not yet how to walk a middle path between ways that are both new and old. This kind of walking cannot be learned in a day.

Let a thoughtful white man have the last word. "We cannot push the Eskimos and we dare not hold them back. Progress is a very delicate operation. They are tough and able on their own ground and about things they understand. But on our ground they are less sure and this is where the trouble starts. They do not always see through us as we see through one another." He paused, frowned at a plane growing larger in the sky and added, "The day the Eskimo can easily and often say "No" to the white man when he believes he is right and the rest of us wrong, then - and only then - will we be brothers. For brothers we must be. Neither they nor we can carry the future of the north alone".

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